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The Uses of a Spy

The movies could never have improved on this joc-
out—Gary Powers walking into the sunset with his
\$50,000 in withheld pay after his vindication by the
CIA, amid the plaudits of the Senate Armed Services
Committee and the packed caucus room. What a happy
ending! As *The New York Times* correspondent put it:
“For a man who twenty months ago was widely
canceled in Congress and the country for not killing him-
self, it was a hero’s redemption.” It shows not only that
one should never despair of success, but that in the
profession of spying one can succeed in other ways than
by obtaining information about the enemy.

When the unsucces of Gary Powers wrecked the
Summit Conference of 1960, it was nevertheless made
plain to all good Americans that this was really the fault
of the Russians and that the image of Khrushchev, in
particular, had been much too generously delineated.
All good Americans also knew that Powers was now in
for such brainwashing and torture that his one regret
would be that he had not used the poison needle with
which the CIA had thoughtfully provided him. The
stereotype thus emerging from the Powers affair is as
indestructible as Mount Everest. Powers testified, both
in Moscow and in Washington, that he was not tortured
or ill-treated in any way, but this in no wise alters our
views of the enemy. We do not concede that he is hu-
man. We are certainly no more optimistic about the
chances of coming to a peaceful agreement with him.
The pseudo-event, produced in the ateliers of Madison
Avenue, is more powerful than any actual event.

While our enemy grows blacker, our own virtue glows
with an ever more golden light. What brought down
the house was Powers’ simple statement that, through-
out his captivity, “There was one thing I always re-
membered while I was there, and that was that I am
an American.” At that moment, though perhaps only
for that moment, Mr. Powers was almost as beloved as
Colonel Gлен. The boy from ol’ Virginia had made
good. Before the Moscow tribunal, he had expressed his
regret for his mission and had told the court that he
felt he had “left his country ‘a very ill place.’” At
the time this seemed plain English and to most good
Americans, including some sections of the press, it
seemed to border on treason. But, before his adoring
audience in Washington, Powers was able to explain
that he had made good of his captors. What he had done
was that he regretted the whole time of his captivity, his
sign of bringing back propaganda, his secret installations, and had caused embarrassment to his captors.
The enemy is really wicked and evil, but we are really
lible; the American is always good, fine and
smart.

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